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TAGS: [KPOL](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [AF](#) [KTIP](#)
SUBJECT: VIEW FROM THE NORTH: KUNDUZ WOMEN NAVIGATE
POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

REF: A. KABUL 3025
[1](#)B. KABUL 2796

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Women in Kunduz Province face problems common throughout the country including illiteracy and violence. However, many Kunduz women are free to work, are much less covered in public than in other areas of the country, and express satisfaction with the Afghan government. The area is ripe for further development of women's potential if key programs are initiated and supported, and security does not worsen. (Reftel A)

DOWA: Illiteracy is the North's Greatest Challenge

[1](#)2. (SBU) Nadira, Director of the Kunduz Department of Women's Affairs (DOWA), estimated that only 10% of women there are literate, and only 25% of girls attend school past sixth grade. Family pressure to stay home and the lack of female teachers in rural areas are the primary reasons why girls drop out of school. She recommended more outreach programs to men and women and particularly religious leaders emphasizing the importance of educated women to Afghan society as a strategy to increase girls' enrollment. She also asked for support in conducting a public outreach campaign to educate women on the electoral process because most women do not have basic information about the elections or understand the importance of voting. In addition she advocated the use of mobile voter registration teams, without which, she predicted, only a small percentage of Kunduz women would register because the voter registration sites are located too far from their villages.

[1](#)3. (U) International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) will host the first of a series of election-focused dialogues with female Members of Parliament on December 2. Through these sessions IFES will provide voter registration information and facilitate discussion of women's participation in elections from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing the recent fatwa issued with the support of 400 Kabul mullahs encouraging women to register and vote. IFES also staffed an elections information booth at the First National Women's Council of Afghanistan, held in Kabul October 28-29, and attended by 500 women from 33 provinces.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Domestic violence, early marriage, and forced marriage are among the other challenges northern women face,

Nadira said. Families give women to other families in order to settle a dispute or as compensation for a crime. Kunduz Province does not have a women's shelter, which, Nadira believes, cause many women not to approach DOWA for help because they know DOWA cannot shelter them. She housed several girls who had run away from home in her own house before the police counseled her this practice was too dangerous. Most women who run away from home due to violence or forced marriage end up in prison. She is working with the Kunduz police to house these women in the children's section of the jail in order to avoid their confinement in the same space as older or dangerous inmates.

¶5. (SBU) Nadira's identification of illiteracy as the primary problem facing Kunduz females and her focus on their lack of civic participation as a major secondary concern contrasts with Herat DOWA and Kabul Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) representatives' approach who mentioned violence first and other issues such as education and voting much later in the conversation. (Reftel B) The Kunduz DOWA did not appear overwhelmed by cases of violence as DOWA offices in other areas are. In the past three months the Kunduz DOWA has not handled a single case of a woman fleeing domestic violence or forced marriage. Nadira's explanation that potential clients do not come in because they know DOWA cannot offer them shelter may be a factor. Indeed a new shelter opened in Mazar-e-Sharif in October and reports receiving approximately seven clients a week. It is also likely, however, that Kunduz women are faring better than their counterparts in other areas of the country, and thus, the potential for advancement if educational opportunities could be expanded is

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evident.

¶6. (SBU) Nadira is well-spoken and thoughtful and focused on practical and specific initiatives such as asking for funding for electoral awareness campaigns and programs to attract female teachers to rural schools. She also recently successfully advocated initially resistant Afghan officials for land to build new DOWA offices.

Live from Kunduz: Five Years of Women's Radio

¶7. (SBU) Najia Khudayar, Director of Radio Zuhra, said the women-run radio station has been broadcasting for almost five years after receiving start up assistance from Internews. The women-focused programming includes shows centered on women's rights under Islam, family issues such as marriage and domestic violence, health, and legal topics.

¶8. (SBU) According to Khudayar, security concerns in Kunduz are increasing. Up until a year and a half ago, the radio staff was able to travel into districts to interview residents, but current security concerns make that travel impossible. The Kunduz UNAMA human rights officer also said that worsening security conditions in recent months caused UNAMA to suspend operations in several districts. Khudayar is increasingly hesitant to send out female reporters and often depends on the station's one male reporter for outside reporting.

¶9. (SBU) Khudayar and her female colleague, Zarghuna Hasan, favored expansion of local government authority, recommending that the ANP be increased and send more police to work in rural areas. Young people turn to violence because they are unemployed and recruiting them as police officers would improve security and make it harder for insurgent groups to attract new members.

¶10. (SBU) Khudayar expressed satisfaction with the national government as well, noting that she was able to get out of her house and start her radio station, and that opportunities for many other women increased due to support from the Karzai administration. Interest in the upcoming election is low

compared to the 2004 and 2005 elections. Only 40%-50% of the local populace will participate, she estimated. People that do participate would generally vote as directed by others, either by men for women, or by ethnic group for all, she said. She and Hasan, however, both enthusiastically said they planned to vote, and that the result of the election would be meaningful for Afghanistan.

¶11. (SBU) Over the past several years the radio station has become involved in several legal cases involving domestic violence and forced marriage. In one case a girl ran away from home in order to avoid marrying a local commander. The commander ordered her arrest and local authorities arrested and imprisoned her. After the girl's mother approached the radio station, Khudayar and her colleagues worked with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to obtain the girl's release. However, the girl was imprisoned for six months before Afghan authorities released her. Khudayar said another common scenario is when a man cannot afford to pay the customary sum to his intended bride's family, the couple runs away and often marries in Kabul or Mazar-e-Sharif. Both the man and woman in these situations spend months in jail when they attempt to return to Kunduz. Honor killings are extremely unusual in the North, Khudayar claimed, because once the local government is involved in a situation, families fear government retribution if they were to kill their daughter or wife.

UNAMA: Weak Rule of Law; Family Response Unit Shows Promise but Needs More Support

¶12. (SBU) Gorretty Akinyi Omala, Kunduz UNAMA human rights officer, said UNAMA received reports of 60 cases of rape of girls aged 8-14 in Takhar Province during 2008, and the

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majority of these cases were not prosecuted. The AIHRC has also reported a sharp increase in reported cases of sexual assault in northern Afghanistan, particularly incidents of child rape. On a positive note, UNAMA has not received substantiated information of cases of trafficking in persons in the four northern provinces covered by the Kunduz office. Kunduz German PRT political assistant, Maria Anna Puertinger, reported that there had been a few reported cases of human trafficking from Takhar Province across the northern border.

¶13. (SBU) The Kunduz Family Response Unit (FRU) mediated several civil cases successfully by counseling disputing parties, resulting in the parties signing an enforceable written agreement, Omala said. The FRU, however, is not fully supported or accepted by police leadership. The female FRU officers could benefit from more training particularly on how to handle criminal cases. Omala approached DynCorp requesting this training but had not yet received a response.

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